Chapter

18

Challenges and Opportunities Related to Canadian Unity

> *The fact of the matter is—you can't legislate unity; You can't lawyer your way to unity; You can't, without severe scarring and human cost, coerce nations within a country to stay unified. Unity in free and democratic countries and federations has to be earned. It has to be worth it.*[1]
>
> —Liam O'Brien, posted 19 February 2008 on the Uni.ca Uniting Canada blog

As the Canadian government continues to pursue a policy of national unity, some individuals and groups within the country have felt excluded from the process, and challenges to unifying the country remain. For example, some Québécois and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups have sought recognition as sovereign nations. Despite such challenges, some political leaders and national figures argue that Canada's pluralism is an example of how many nations can live together cooperatively and peacefully and work towards an inclusive, multicultural society.

Figure 18-1 ▶

Demonstrators of the Mouvement de Libération Nationale du Québec (Québec National Liberation Movement) march with flags during Canada Day celebrations in Québec City, 1 July 2003.

1 from: http://www.uni.ca/index_e.php

What challenges and opportunities arise for individuals, groups, and governments in promoting Canadian unity? Is the whole truly greater than the sum of its parts or would the needs of every citizen be more properly addressed if alternatives to national unity were pursued?

Chapter Issue

To what extent do the challenges and opportunities related to national unity affect Canadian identity?

In this chapter you will examine the challenges and opportunities associated with the promotion of Canadian national unity, for example, bilingualism, multiculturalism, Québec sovereignty, Aboriginal self-determination and land claims, and federal-provincial and -territorial relations. The following inquiry questions will be used to guide your exploration:

- What are some Canadian unity challenges and opportunities associated with nations within Canada?
- What are some Canadian unity challenges and opportunities associated with governments within Canada?

This chapter will also help you prepare a response to the Main Issue for Part 4 (chapters 16 -19): ***To what extent should individuals and groups in Canada embrace a national identity?***

SKILL PATH

Creating an Interactive and Engaging Presentation

Robert L. Lindstrom is an award-winning journalist, editor, author, and consultant specializing in using technology in business communications. In his article "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Presentation," he compares the power of media to magic:

The kinship between magic and media is the power of ***enchantment****—to attract and move deeply; to influence by or as if by charms and incantation. In training, selling, teaching or any other form of communication the enchantment lies in the power to attract, engage (move) and influence the audience. Those are the hallmarks of both Harry Potter magic and media communication magic.*[2]

Take a moment to reflect on "magical" or moving presentations or performances you have experienced, given by students, teachers, teammates, or others. What did they have in common?

Use these steps to help you create a presentation that will captivate your audience.

Step 1 **Make it Relevant**

People are most likely to connect with a presentation if it is somehow relevant to their lives; Lindstrom calls this the "charm of relevance." Consider carefully what your audience will connect to before the project takes shape to help ensure that your presentation will strike a chord.

Step 2 **Understand your Topic**

Without appropriate knowledge, a presenter will struggle and the "magic" will be broken. Prepare thoroughly for your presentation. Do research and anticipate what questions the audience might ask. The better you can address questions, the more authority you will have as a presenter.

Step 3 **Focus on Visuals**

Bob Lipp, president of Better Business Presentations in New York, has said:

Presentations that throw a lot of words at an audience, hoping some will stick, rarely achieve their goal. Strong visuals are the antidote … and they're essential for impressing the audience.[3]

Be creative and find pictures, images, and props that will engage your audience. During your presentation, refer to the visuals you have selected. Try making direct reference to the content of the visuals by asking rhetorical or direct questions, so the audience will focus on the presentation materials. If you are using presentation software, remember to allow the audience enough time to absorb your visuals. When practising your presentation, pay close attention to how you will use the visuals to convey your message.

Step 4 **Involve the Audience**

In addition to making eye contact during your presentation, try engaging your audience by moving through the room. If possible, encourage audience participation. Have people raise their hands, stand up, or respond to questions. Remember that the presentation is about them, not about you. The more the audience can do or become involved, the greater the impact of your presentation.

Practise It!

As a class or in groups, make a list of Canadians who are involved with issues related to Canadian unity. Choose one Canadian and plan and deliver a presentation about how he or she has addressed challenges or opportunities related to Canadian unity. When you have finished presenting, invite others to ask questions and provide feedback.

2 Robert L. Lindstrom, "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Presentation," Presenters University, August 2005. http://www.presentersuniversity.com/Courses_Potter.php.

3 Quoted in Steven Elwell, "Presentation Innovation," 27 March 2007. http://www.managesmarter.com/msg/content_display/publications/e3i3bf80502ce8c62e9926ead7110d9744a.

Nations within Canada and Canadian Unity

Question for Inquiry

- **What are some Canadian unity challenges and opportunities associated with nations within Canada?**

In this section you will look at some of the nations within Canada and the challenges and opportunities they present to promoting Canadian unity. Challenges presented by the diverse nations of Canada can be summarized by the following concern: If all groups and nations within Canada are being asked to become more unified—to become *one Canada*—what does this mean for each group's unique culture, heritage, language, and identity? Opportunities presented by the diverse nations of Canada include the idea that Canada's vision of unity has shifted over time from one of *exclusion* toward one of *inclusion*. According to writer and former Edmonton journalist Satya Das:

> *Our present-day accommodation of cultural and racial diversity is all the more remarkable given our past of head taxes, forced internment and the subjugation and deracination of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Our ability to build consensus, to find an evolving national identity, to establish a context for peace, order and good government to flourish have all evolved from a shameful and horrific past. That's why the great Canadian experiment—the task of building a nation from every imaginable stream of human experience—can be a fine model for the world. We are at last engaged in the arduous endeavour of coming to terms with the injustices once bred in the bone.*[3]

Figure 18-2

Can people who belong to nations seeking greater independence from Canada still consider being Canadian part of their identity?

Ideas and Opinions

Michael Novak—award-winning author of over 25 books, theologian, and Director of Social and Political Studies at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC—has served as an American ambassador on a number of UN commissions and task forces. He has written:

> *"Unity in diversity is the highest possible attainment of a civilization, a testimony to the most noble possibilities of the human race. This attainment is made possible through passionate concern for choice, in an atmosphere of social trust."*[4]
>
> **—Michael Novak, epigraph opening *Unity in Diversity: An Index to the Publications of Conservative and Libertarian Institutions* (1983).**

Does supporting the diversity of cultures and languages in Canada promote national unity?

3 Satya Das, *The Best Country: Why Canada Will Lead the Future* (Edmonton, AB: Cambridge Strategies Inc., 2002), p. 15.

4 From: http://bahai-library.com/theses/unity.diversity.html.

Fast Facts

Linguistic duality was enshrined in law at the earliest stages of the development of the Canadian federation. At a time when it was accepted practice to establish sovereignty through war and cultural domination there were enough Canadians who believed in the virtues of accommodation and mutual respect to ensure that, with some exceptions, Canada would develop peaceably and the foundations of its diversity would be preserved.[6]

The Policy of Bilingualism

In the 1960s, the Québec government under Jean Lesage was modernizing. The process of modernization has become known as the Quiet Revolution, and had as its slogan: *"Maîtres chez nous"* ("Masters in our own house"). The federal Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, launched by Lester B. Pearson in 1963, was "to inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races."[5]

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism resulted in the Official Languages Act of 1969. The Commission noted:

> *For the Commission, therefore, language is much more than a simple means of communication and culture is much more than the persistence of a few psychological traits or expressions of folklore. We feel it is unacceptable to consider the French language in Canada … as a mere personal or family trait, encountered in church, in some associations, or at best in elementary school, but not elsewhere. The life of the … [Québécois] culture implies in principle the life of the … language.*[7]

The Commission recommended the adoption of bilingualism and biculturalism—the language and the culture of the two founding nations of Canada—in order to promote a Canadian identity.

As a result of the Commission's recommendations, the goals of the Official Languages Act were to achieve

- *the equality of English and French in Parliament, within the Government of Canada, the federal administration and institutions subject to the Act;*
- *the preservation and development of official language communities in Canada;*
- *the equality of English and French in Canadian society.*[8]

In 1968, a Québec government commission (the Commission of Inquiry on the Situation of the French Language and Linguistic Rights in Québec, commonly known as the Gendron Commission) was set up to consider the situation of the French language in Québec. The findings of this commission, published in 1972,

Pause and Reflect

Do you feel the choice of Canada's founders to protect linguistic duality has been a positive or negative force for unity in this country? What evidence can you offer to support your position? Based on your evidence and your position, how should Canada and its citizens proceed with interactions between its official language groups?

Pause and Reflect

The phrase "of the two founding nations of Canada" was used historically. Today, we use the phrase "two of the founding nations." What is the significance of this change?

5 From: http://www.ucalgary.ca/lib-old/SpecColl/laing.htm.

6 Heritage Canada, "Canadian Diversity: Respecting our Differences," 20 January 2004. http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/respect_e.cfm.

7 *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, Book I, supra, at xxxviii, 1969.

8 Canadian Heritage, "History of Bilingualism in Canada," 14 November 2007. http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/lo-ol/biling/hist_e.cfm.

eventually resulted in Bill 101—a bill to protect the French language—and a rejection of official bilingualism in Québec. Here is an excerpt from the Commission's report:

> *It appears that if French is not in the process of disappearing among Francophones, it is neither the prevalent language in the Québec labour market. French appears useful only to Francophones. Even in Québec, it is altogether a marginal language, since non-Francophones have little use for it, and, for a considerable number of Francophones, in the important tasks, use as much, and sometimes more English than their mother tongue. And that, in spite of fact that, in Québec, Francophones are a strong majority, in labour as in the population in general.*[9]

The Québécois reaction to the Official Languages Act at the time was strong. Since the Act failed to bring about political and institutional reforms along with the linguistic reforms, René Lévesque called it a "fool's bargain," based on the record of Francophone assimilation outside of Québec. Premier Daniel Johnson, elected in 1966 under a slogan of "*Égalité ou Indépendence*" ("Equality or Independence"), pressed for special status for Québec in federal–provincial negotiations.

According to *Globe and Mail* writer and author John Ibbitson, writing decades later, the bilingualism policy has had the following effect:

> *As a result of, and on top of, all the appeasements—the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the tortured efforts to patriate the Constitution that could accommodate the French fact, Pierre Trudeau's Herculean (and ultimately failed) attempts to strengthen bilingualism and the central government—Ottawa became a town dominated by Québec thought, Québec values, Québec priorities.*[10]

On the other hand, Satya Das notes that:

> *Most children in Edmonton's public school system will have been exposed to both national languages at some point in their schooling by the time they graduate … While a small group decries official bilingualism, the cosmopolitan face of the immigrant-shaped West recognizes the value of knowing the two national languages, besides any heritage languages inherited from parents and grandparents.*[11]

Figure 18-3 ▲
Bilingual sign on a gas station in Québec

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Do the quotations by John Ibbitson, Satya Das, or Michael Adams reflect your understandings of Canada? Explain.

What are the various positions expressed in these quotations regarding the promotion of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada? Is this debate continuing in Canada today? To what extent is this debate an element of Canadian identity?

9 From the report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Situation of the French Language and Linguistic Rights in Quebec, 1972. http://english.republiquelibre.org/Institutional-bilingualism.html

10 John Ibbitson, *The Polite Revolution: Perfecting the Canadian Dream* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2005), p. 86.

11 Satya Das, *The Best Country: Why Canada Will Lead the Future* (Edmonton, AB: Cambridge Strategies Inc., 2002), pp. 108–109.

Michael Adams, a prominent researcher into social trends in Canada, has stated:

> *The result [of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism] was the official recognition of Canada's linguistic duality and multicultural heritage—the political birth of modern Canada—and the formal entrenchment of one of the most significant differences between Canada and the United States, one that has become more, not less, important over the past half-century.*[12]

Reactions to the Official Languages Act

When the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism presented its findings in 1969, the responses of individuals and groups across the country varied. The following three perspectives represent some of the reactions to the Official Languages Act at the time.

Russian-born Canadian lawyer and politician David Lewis was a New Democratic Party MP in 1968. He said:

For the first time in the 40-odd years I have lived here, there is an atmosphere and climate in English speaking Canada which makes possible the acceptance of the fact that bilingualism is part of the Canadian mosaic.[13]

During a House of Commons debate in 1969, Progressive Conservative MP Cliff Downey, from Battle River, Alberta, said:

If this policy is further buttressed by legislation such as that now before us, it will effectively debar from the public service all but a handful of Canadians whose mother tongue is other than French. If such an obvious step is taken to alienate western Canadian citizens from their capital and central government, it will not be surprising if the voice of western separatism becomes louder and louder.[14]

While some federalist Francophones, such as Pierre Trudeau and Marc Lalonde, wrote that the vision of a crisis between French and English Canadians was exaggerated, one source suggests that by 1972, academics and leaders in Québec felt that

Institutional bilingualism was rejected as insufficient and in some regards even harmful to Québec. For Québec politicians, the move of Ottawa was seen as too little, too late. It was a timid response to something Ottawa considered a more serious problem: the rise of a secular Québec nationalism and separatism among the young generations of Québec Francophones.[15]

1. Is bilingualism a challenge to national unity? Does bilingualism generate opportunities related to national unity?
2. What effect did the Official Languages Act have on separatism in Canada?
3. What effect did official bilingualism have on national unity?

12 Michael Adams, *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* (Penguin Books, 2004).

13 *House of Commons Debates*, 17 October 1968, p. 1487.

14 *House of Commons Debates*, 21 May 1969, p. 8918.

15 La République Libre du Québec, "Institutional Bilingualism." http://english.republiquelibre.org/Institutional-bilingualism.html.

A recent report by Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages cites a Focus Canada survey indicating that public support for bilingualism is on the rise:

The results suggest that Canadian policy on official languages is increasingly part of Canada's social fabric and of what defines us as a country.

Here is the overall portrait that emerges from our inquiry into public opinion:

A strong majority of Canadians say they personally favour bilingualism for the entire country (72%) as well as for their own province (70%). This represents a significant increase since 2003, due to greater support from Anglophones. Among young adults aged 18 to 34 years, support for Canadian bilingualism is 80%.

Certain additional questions make it possible to better evaluate the basis for support for bilingualism and linguistic equality. For example, 77% of Canadians feel that if more resources are required to guarantee the same quality of education for a Francophone minority (or an Anglophone minority in Québec) as that provided to the children of the majority, such resources should be made available.

Not only have the two official languages made 21st century Canada a more open society, they have also encouraged greater solidarity among the two official language groups. [A total of] 82% of Francophones and 74% of Anglophones believe that the two official language groups should enjoy equal quality of education, and are willing to provide more resources to the minority in order to meet that standard.

Moreover, the Canadian public continues to view bilingualism as an advantage, both in personal and economic terms. Bilingualism is one of the most fulfilling things one can do for oneself (84% [agreed]) and constitutes a success factor, within the country (84% [agreed]) and around the world (89% [agreed]). For most Canadians, bilingualism means learning a second official language, although interest in learning other languages is on the rise.

Finally, 7 out of 10 Canadians think that living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian.[16]

Pause and Reflect

What are the implications of the findings cited by Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages' Focus Canada survey for the promotion of Canadian unity?

16 *The Evolution of Public Opinion on Official Languages in Canada*, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, September 2006.

The Policy of Multiculturalism

Other heritage groups expressed concern that their voices did not have the same weight as those of Francophones or of people of British descent. Ukrainian heritage groups, for example—fearing that Ukrainians were becoming assimilated within the Anglo-Canadian culture—began to implement Ukrainian-Canadian community projects, such as bilingual education programs in the Prairie provinces and the establishment of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies in Edmonton. Heritage groups and others lobbied the government for the opportunity to have a greater role in shaping government policy. When the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism held hearings across Canada, many different groups informed them that a *multicultural* framework spoke more to all of Canada than did a *bicultural* framework. The Commission recognized the cultural pluralism of Canada and agreed that there was more scope for a multicultural framework in the nation.

According to the federal Department of Canadian Heritage:

> *In 1971, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. By so doing, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation. The 1971 Multiculturalism Policy of Canada also confirmed the rights of Aboriginal peoples and the status of Canada's two official languages.*[17]

Figure 18-4 ▲

Students celebrating Canada Day

Once the multiculturalism policy was in place, however, there were new concerns about what it meant for Canadians. Satya Das, along with Judge Gurcharan Singh Bhatia, started a newspaper called the *Prairie Link* (later the *Canadian Link*) to explore shared beliefs and principles contributing to Canada's multiculturalism policy. Das explains

> *We were disturbed by the tendency of official multicultural policy to put people in ghettoes … We were in a milieu where "multiculturalism" was defined as giving grants to ethnic and cultural associations to propagate and perpetuate their own traditions. We believed that this would ultimately lead to an abundance of solitudes, if there were no attempt to share across cultures, across ethnicity, across religion. The fundamentally hollow concept of "tolerance" only invited acceptance of something, it did not lead to sharing, discovery and ultimately celebration.*[18]

17 Heritage Canada, "Canadian Multiculturalism: An Inclusive Citizenship," 23 May 2007. http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm.

18 Satya Das, *The Best Country: Why Canada Will Lead the Future* (Edmonton, AB: Cambridge Strategies Inc., 2002), p. 74.

Similarly, the findings of the Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future, established in 1991, stated

> *While Canadians accept and value Canada's cultural diversity, they do not value many of the activities of the multicultural program of the federal government. These are seen as expensive and divisive in that they remind Canadians of their different origins rather than their shared symbols, society and future.*[19]

Québec Sovereignty and National Unity

Daniel Turp, a native-born Québécois, a Bloc Québécois member of the Canadian Parliament (1997–2000), and current Parti Québécois member of the National Assembly of Québec, has spent much of his career studying the issues underlying Québec sovereignty. Posted on his website, the paper "Québec Sovereignty: A Legitimate Goal" states:

> *The Québec nation is an open, pluralist and multiethnic society. Most Quebeckers have always accepted cultural diversity and the enrichment it brings. They have, moreover, long considered it an advantage to identify with both Québec and Canada, thereby being citizens of a multinational state … Canada, however, fails to adequately protect the French language outside Québec, and refuses to fully recognize the Québec government's authority and autonomy in matters of language and culture within Québec territory.*[20]

The issue of protecting the French language and culture extends back to the Royal Proclamation Act (1763), and continued in the Québec Act (1774) and the Upper and Lower Canadian rebellions of 1837. It extended into the Quiet Revolution of Jean Lesage's Liberal government in Québec in the 1960s. Claude Bélanger, a professor at Marianopolis College in Montréal, wrote

> *The energies and hopes unleashed during the Quiet Revolution years shook the very foundations of Canada and are still being felt today … The underlying belief in Québec, during this period, was that French Canadians should not be content to play a second class role in socio-politico-economic matters and that the key to a full, 'normal' development of the community rested in the utilization of the only tool which collectively French Canadians controlled: the state of Québec … The government of Jean Lesage thus became the symbol and the tool of a whole people on the road to self-assertion.*[21]

Pause and Reflect

Do you agree that multiculturalism programs are "expensive and divisive"? Is multiculturalism a challenge to national unity? Does multiculturalism generate opportunities related to national unity? In what ways does multiculturalism reflect a Canadian national identity?

Fast Facts

The term *Quiet Revolution*, or *la Révolution tranquille*, was first coined by an anonymous *Globe and Mail* journalist to describe the rapid changes that occurred in Québec from 1960 to 1966. These included movement away from the traditional French-Canadian identification with the church; change in provincial politics; and a new delineation of political lines into separatist and federalist factions.

19 From: http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/936-e.htm.

20 Michel Seymour, Lubin Bisson, Didier Calmels, et al., "Quebec Sovereignty: A Legitimate Goal," Intellectuals for the Sovereignty of Quebec (IPSO). http://www.rocler.qc.ca/turp/eng/Intellectuals/Intel.htm.

21 Claude Bélanger, "Jean Lesage and the Quiet Revolution (1960–1966)," 1998. http://www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/readings/lesage.htm.

The Quiet Revolution was characterized by increased provincial government control over health care, hydro-electricity, education, and the introduction of other social reforms. To achieve this, Québec increased its taxes substantially. For this reason and those described by Professor Bélanger below, relations between the governments of Canada and Québec became strained. According to Professor Bélanger

> *This tension resulted from a number of factors … the government of Jean Lesage not only refused federal initiatives in provincial matters but implemented its own programmes … the Lesage government brought in many reforms which necessitated the transfer of fiscal powers from the federal to the provincial government; the federal government was not about to relinquish some of its fiscal powers without presenting great resistance; 3) the third source of tension was that French Canadians now desired to be recognized, not only individually but also collectively, as equals in Confederation.*[22]

In this climate of change and self-affirmation among the Francophones of Québec, René Lévesque formed the separatist Parti Québécois in 1968. His party had little success until it won the provincial election of 1976, receiving 41.1 per cent of the popular vote and 71 seats out of 110 in Québec's legislature, after campaigning for a referendum on sovereignty-association. If implemented, sovereignty-association would see residents of Québec clearly taking charge over the direction of their relationship with the rest of Canada. This referendum was an important second step for Lévesque's government, after passing the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms on 27 June 1975. Lévesque's government would subsequently pass Bill 101, making French the only language allowed on commercial signs in the province and restricting students of immigrant families to French-language schools.

Bill 101 paved the way for the 20 May 1980 referendum on whether Québec should pursue sovereignty-association in its relationship with the rest of Canada. Almost 60 per cent of Québec voters chose to remain within Canada.

With the defeat of the 1980 referendum, Lévesque shifted his focus from separatism to Québec's economic development. However, the sovereignty movement persisted. Jacques Parizeau, who was elected leader of the Parti Québécois in 1988, became premier of Québec in 1994 and promised a referendum. This time, the referendum would focus on Québec's *secession*, not the development

Fast Facts

In 1968, René Lévesque published a manifesto called *Option Québec*. In it, he described two important concepts: 1) the need for the Québec state to achieve sovereignty, and 2) the need for an association to exist between this new Québec state and the rest of Canada. The Liberal Party, of which Lévesque was at that time a member, rejected this option. He left the Liberal Party and founded the Parti Québécois. Lévesque's desire for sovereignty-association became part of the Parti Québécois platform.

22 Claude Bélanger, "Jean Lesage and the Quiet Revolution (1960–1966)," 1998. http://www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/readings/lesage.htm.

of a compromise between Canada and Québec under sovereignty-association, as it had in 1980. On 30 October 1995, the second referendum in pursuit of Québec independence was held. It was defeated, with 50.58 per cent of voters voting "No" to 49.42 per cent voting "Yes." Canada remained intact. Parizeau resigned soon after as leader of the Parti Québécois.

One of the major leaders in Québec today is Mario Dumont. This young leader of the *Action démocratique du Québec* (ADQ) political party was a committed sovereignist in the early 1990s, but increased the party's seats from 5 to 41 in the 2007 provincial election by campaigning for a "politically and financially autonomous Québec without separation."[23] This may have been more appealing to voters when contrasted with André Boisclair's Parti Québécois and his promise of yet another referendum on separation. The differences of opinion between these leaders about how to shape Canada's future did, however, contribute to the first minority government in Québec in 130 years, under the Liberals.

Pause and Reflect

In what ways is the story of Québécois sovereignty a reflection of a peoples' need for recognition of their national identity? In what ways does this pose a challenge for Canadian national unity? In what ways does the Québécois sovereignty movement create an opportunity for the promotion of Canadian national identity?

Ben Lafontaine / artizans.com

Figure 18-5

"Light switch on Québec says 'Non.'" The second Québec referendum resulted in a narrow victory for the "No" side. Ninety-four per cent of the electorate voted.

Web Link

Visit the *Perspectives on Nationalism* website and follow the link to an audio and video archived review of Québec elections from 1960 to 2007.

23 From: http://www.cbc.ca/quebecvotes2007/parties/dumont.html.

Aboriginal Self-Determination and the Federal Government

In 1999, former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations Ovide Mercredi presented his vision of the future, and identified some of the issues facing Aboriginals today as a result of previous Canadian government policies and practices:

Today's Aboriginal people's needs are many. Years of isolation, exclusion, and neglect of our rights have resulted in our displacement from our lands, the breakdown of our economy, the loss of our culture, the denial of our power to govern ourselves, and the deplorable poverty that is now an integral part of our identity within Canada.

To ignore the needs of Aboriginal peoples, as Canada's political and economic elites have often attempted to do, or to dismiss them as irrelevant to the higher goal of building a strong united country, is to jeopardize the future of Canada. Québec has long argued that outmoded concepts of federalism can no longer sustain unity.

In other words, we need to build a better country: a statement that implies Canada can be perfected.

To that end, building a country based on principles of inclusiveness would be preferable to maintaining a state that primarily serves the needs of urban dwellers. In this necessary enterprise to strengthen Canada, the hopes and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, women, the West, and Québec cannot be ignored …

The greatest ambitions of Aboriginal peoples are to restore and reclaim their assaulted cultures and languages, to own land and resources, to rebuild their economy, and to re-establish governments based on Indigenous concepts of consensual democracy that will provide their people with the legacy of good government Canada has failed to offer.

Our vision includes respect for civil and human rights, and the freedom of individuals to participate in Canada's national life, free from discrimination, racism, or poverty. It is a vision that would allow our people to be themselves, to advance as distinct peoples, and yet remain active and contributing citizens of a country that has finally stopped hurting them.[24]

The issues surrounding Aboriginal land claims have posed both challenges to and opportunities for Canadian unity. Establishing agreements between Aboriginal peoples and the federal government is quite a complex task, as the claims are often linked to social issues,

Pause and Reflect

In what ways does the neglect of Aboriginal peoples continue to "jeopardize the future of Canada"? What do you feel Mercredi is suggesting when he uses the phrase "outmoded concepts of federalism"?

Figure 18-6

Ovide Mercredi, Assembly of First Nations Chief 1991-1997

24 Ovide Mercredi, "Inclusive Canada: A Millenium of Respect and Tolerance" (The Dominion Institute. 1999). http://www.greatquestions.com/e/q3_mercredi_2.html

governance, and other matters. Regardless, the federal government and Canadian Aboriginal peoples have been successful in negotiating several important settlements.

One exciting example of land claims developments in Canada during the latter half of the 20th century is the formation of the territory of Nunavut. Nunavut was formed as a result of the 1973 Inuit Tapirisat of Canada study on Inuit land use and occupancy, and came into being on 1 April 1999.

Nunavut is not the only example of a successful land claims bid. On 26 April 2007, the CBC reported that an agreement had been reached between Chief Noah Augustine of the Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq First Nation in Red Bank, New Brunswick, and the federal government.

Chief Noah Augustine … told a news conference Thursday the band will receive $1.35 million compensation for the lost 66 hectares and for the loss of use of the land [that was taken from its reserve a century ago]. The Mi'kmaq have also been given the right to buy 121 hectares of land anywhere in the province and turn it into a part of the First Nation. Augustine said the band could, for example, purchase land near Moncton and build a big box store. Since the land would be considered part of the reserve, taxed revenue from the business would go back to the band.[25]

Figure 18-7

The areas of treaties between the government of Canada and First Nations and Inuit

RS Robinson-Superior Treaty, 1850, Ojibwa
RH Robinson-Huron Treaty, 1850, Ojibwa
DT Douglas Treaties, 1850-51; Songhee, Sanetch, T'Souke, Nanaimo
MI Manitoulin Island Treaty, 1862 Ottawa, Ojibwa
1. Treaty #1, 1871: Ojibwa, Cree
2. Treaty #2, 1871: Ojibwa, Cree
3. Treaty #3, 1873: Ojibwa
4. Treaty #4, 1874: Ojibwa, Cree, Assiniboine
5. Treaty #5, 1875 (Adhesions, 1908-1910): Ojibwa, Cree
6. Treaty #6, 1876 (Adhesions, 1889): Chipewyan, Cree, Assiniboine
7. Treaty #7, 1877: Blackfoot, Blood, Piegan, Tsuu T'ina, Chipewyan, Assiniboine
8. Treaty #8, 1899: Cree, Chipewyan, Tasttine
9. Treaty #9, 1905-1906, (Adhesions, 1929-1930): Ojibwa, Cree
10. Treaty #10, 1906: Chipewyan, Cree
11. Treaty #11, 1921: Slave, Dogrib, Loucheux, Hare
WT Williams Treaties, 1923: Ojibwa, Mississauga

Figure 18-8

The territory of Nunavut, and its flag, inset

25 CBC News, "Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq First Nation, Ottawa Reach Deal," 26 April 2007. http://www.cbc.ca/canada/new-brunswick/story/2007/04/26/nb-metepenagiagclaim.html.

Self-Government for First Nations

The federal government has agreed in principle to the right to self-government by First Nations peoples. However, an agreement on the meaning of self-government for First Nations has not been reached.

The Institute on Governance, created in 1990, has stated:

In the mid-1970s, the first modern treaties were concluded between the federal and Québec governments and the Cree, Naskapi and Inuit of northern Québec—treaties with a significant self-government component. Since then, momentum has gathered slowly. Canada's approach is unique: no other country in the world is in the process of creating a separate order of government for its Indigenous peoples.[26]

In November 2005, Prime Minister Paul Martin presided over an unprecedented summit involving first ministers and Aboriginal leaders in Kelowna, BC, to discuss ways of improving living conditions for Aboriginal Canadians and expanding their educational and economic opportunities. According to a CTV news story, Prime Minister Martin said:

Aboriginal Canadians must have an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of prosperity … gaps in education, health care, housing and employment opportunities that exist between Aboriginal Canadians and others in Canada must be closed. We are here today because the descendants of the people who first occupied this land must have an equal opportunity to work for and to enjoy the benefits of our collective prosperity … today, the majority do not.[27]

National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Phil Fontaine, who currently leads the drive to obtain both self-government and the improvement of conditions for First Nations people, had this to say on 3 November 2005:

Fundamentally changing the process of policy making concerning First Nations treaties, self-government and land claims is essential in ensuring that recognition and implementation of First Nations rights can be achieved … Joint approaches accommodating First Nations perspectives are called for. These approaches must reflect legal and constitutional developments over the past 30 years. This is now being acknowledged and acted on as the means of securing effective policy.[28]

Figure 18-9 ▲

Paul Martin with Aboriginal leaders in Kelowna, BC, November 2005.

Figure 18-10 ▲

Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine

26 Institute on Governance, "Aboriginal Governance." http://www.iog.ca/knowledge_areas.asp?pageID=2&area=1.

27 CTV.ca News Staff, "PM, First Nations Leaders Hold Historic Summit," 24 November 2005. http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20051124/martin_aboriginal_summit_051124?s_name=&no_ads=.

28 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, "Assembly of First Nations Leaders and Federal Ministers Meet on Joint Action for Policy Change," News Release, 3 November 2005. http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/nr/prs/s-d2005/2-02729_e.html.

Then, on 28 November 2006, speaking to the UN Human Rights Council, Fontaine said:

First Nations are deeply disappointed and seriously concerned about the potential impact of today's vote at the United Nations affecting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples … First Nations, and Indigenous peoples, expect that regardless of the outcome of the vote today, we will continue to assert Indigenous rights to have full participation in any future discussions affecting the UN Declaration … It is a double standard for Prime Minister Harper and his government to champion the rights of a segment of the Canadian population through the motion of the recognition of the Québécois as a nation within Canada and then actively oppose and manipulate other countries to oppose Indigenous peoples' rights including those of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada.[29]

The Harper federal government came under harsh criticism when Fontaine issued this statement, in March 2007, criticizing the federal government's response to the AFN campaign, "Make Poverty History: The First Nations Plan for Creating Opportunity."

We gathered in solidarity to show Canadians, and the global community, that we will no longer tolerate the abject levels of poverty facing too many of our First Nations people. The AFN also launched a new report, The $9 Billion Myth Exposed: Why First Nations Poverty Endures *… Canadians have been told that $9.1 billion is spent every year on First Nations. In fact, a maximum of $5.4 billion is spent on First Nations—that is, only 60% of the amount reported by Minister Prentice. His department spends up to $600 million or 11% on overhead alone. Even more revealing is that the total budget of Indian and Northern Affairs represents only 0.004% of Canada's Gross Domestic Product.*[30]

Fast Facts

On 13 September 2007, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration). The Declaration establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-being, and rights of the world's Indigenous peoples. Canada was one of only four nations to vote against it.[31]

1. Describe Aboriginal perspectives and federal government perspectives on First Nations self-government.
2. Research the issues surrounding First Nations self-government in Canada and describe a possible solution that encourages national unity. In your solution, consider the ideas from the quotation at the beginning of the chapter: that unity "has to be worth it" to the nations involved and that unity cannot be gained through coercion.

Explore the Issues

1. Create a graphic organizer that depicts the challenges to and opportunities for Canadian unity related to Canada being a "nation of nations."
2. What implications does Dumont's position on Québec sovereignty have for Canadian unity? What evidence is there of the power of the Québec sovereignty movement today?
3. What implications does Aboriginal self-determination have for Canadian unity? What evidence is there of the power of the Aboriginal self-determination movement today?

29 Phil Fontaine, quoted in "Assembly of First Nations Expresses Disappointment and Concern regarding the Vote to Delay Consideration of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," 28 November 2006, on the Assembly of First Nations website. http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=3189.

30 Phil Fontaine, "A Communiqué from National Chief Phil Fontaine," March 2007, published on the Assembly of First Nations website. http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=3396.

31 Assembly of First Nations, "Implementing The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", published on the Assembly of First Nations website. http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=2944.

Governments within Canada and Canadian Unity

Question for Inquiry

- **What are some Canadian unity challenges and opportunities associated with governments within Canada?**

The responsibilities of Canada's various levels of government are outlined in the Constitution. The goal of the Constitution's authors was to protect regional autonomy while preserving the integrity of the entire union.

This has permitted strong leaders—such as former premiers Ralph Klein and Mike Harris—to obtain more for their provinces, giving the impression that leaders of territories and less dominant provinces have been left with smaller voices. Federal-provincial and interprovincial relations have, at times, been strained throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

The ongoing struggle for political power among Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments has provided both challenges and opportunities related to the promotion of national unity. In this section you will examine the relationships among Canada's governments and their impacts on national unity.

Constitutional Reform

Following the 1980 Québec referendum on sovereignty-association with Canada, in which Québec voters chose to remain within a united Canada, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau followed up on his promise to renew federalism by patriating the Constitution (the British North America Act, 1867) from Britain. Once the Constitution became an Act of the Canadian—rather than of the British—Parliament, Canada would be free to amend the Constitution to suit the interests of various groups in Canada, including the Québécois. An agreement to patriate the Constitution was reached at a 1981 first ministers' meeting, although without the approval of Québec's premier, René Lévesque.

The British North America Act was patriated from Britain in 1982. It was included, along with a new Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in the Constitution Act, passed by the Canadian Parliament in that year.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was part of the Constitution Act, 1982, included the protection of

- guarantee of rights and freedoms
- fundamental freedoms
- democratic rights
- mobility rights

- existing Aboriginal treaties and rights
- legal rights
- equality rights
- official languages of Canada
- minority language educational rights

Patriating the Constitution and including a new Charter of Rights and Freedoms was possible only with the support of Canada's premiers. Through extensive negotiations, Canada developed an intergovernmental agreement on the Charter, an amending formula and a "notwithstanding clause" that allowed provinces to opt out of the Charter for five years before having to renew legislation. In this manner, national unity is maintained while provincial autonomy is respected. Despite these efforts, Québec refused to sign the Constitution in 1982, which gave way to further efforts at reform.

Such efforts included the Meech Lake (1987) and Charlottetown (1992) accords.

The Meech Lake Accord had these key elements:

- the recognition of Québec as a "distinct society"
- a constitutional veto for Québec
- increased provincial powers over immigration
- the right of provinces to opt out of future federal programs with compensation
- provincial input into the appointment of Supreme Court judges and senators

Fast Facts

Before 1982, Canada's Constitution was kept in London, England.

Figure 18-11

Queen Elizabeth II signs the Constitution Act as Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and aides look on, in Ottawa, 17 April 1982.

The powerful scope of this document required that it have support from all ten provincial legislatures by 1990, but this was not achieved.

After the Meech Lake Accord failed, efforts were made to salvage its best aspects and enshrine them in a new set of constitutional changes known as the Charlottetown Accord. Participants at the 1992 Charlottetown meetings pushed for

- increased provincial jurisdiction over forestry, mining, and cultural affairs
- the right of provinces to opt out of future federal programs with compensation so long as the provincial programs conformed to national standards
- the creation of a "social charter" to promote objectives such as health care, welfare, and education
- jurisdictional recognition of Aboriginal self-government
- a "Canada clause" that established values inherent in the "Canadian character"
- the progression to a "Triple E" senate (*elected*, *effective*, and *equal*, in which each province would have the same number of elected senators)
- an increased scope of federal/provincial/territorial/Aboriginal issues relative to the amending formula (meaning that there should be Aboriginal consent to future constitutional amendments that directly refer to Aboriginal peoples)

One main difference between this agreement and the Meech Lake Accord was the requirement that it be ratified in a national referendum, in which the citizens of Canada would decide if they accepted its terms. On 26 October 1992, 54 per cent of Canadians voted "No," and the Charlottetown Accord thus did not succeed. If a majority of Canadians had voted for the accord, the Constitution would have been amended and Québec would then have signed the Constitution. On the contrary, the rejection of both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords had the effect of increasing support for separatism among Québécois. The 1992 rejection of the Charlottetown Accord was followed by the 1993 election of over 50 separatist Bloc Québécois MPs to the House of Commons (who formed the official opposition); the 1994 election of the separatist Parti Québécois to power as the government of Québec; and the 1995 Québec referendum on separation, in which voters were 49.4 per cent in favour of pursuing sovereignty.

Explore the Issues

1. In a group, find an article or news story that describes an example of how the relationships between federal, provincial, and territorial governments influence Canadian unity. Prepare a summary of the article that describes the perspectives on Canadian unity involved. Discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with the promotion of Canadian unity in relation to the story. As a group, refer to the Skill Path and develop a class presentation. After the presentation, meet to evaluate what you could do to improve next time and to celebrate what worked well. SKILLS

Reflect and Analyze

In this chapter you have examined some challenges and opportunities associated with the pursuit of national unity, such as bilingualism, multiculturalism, Québec sovereignty, Aboriginal self-determination and federal-provincial and -territorial relations. These opportunities and challenges also influence Canadian national identity.

Respond to Ideas

1. National unity is more than a topic for political leaders or a party platform. Many artists have addressed the topic of national unity. Find a writer, painter, or musician who has identified an opportunity for, or a challenge to, national unity. Write a description of 200 to 500 words to showcase the artist's position on Canadian unity. Include a copy of the artist's work, whether it is artwork, an excerpt from his or her writing, or lyrics from a song. Be sure to introduce your piece with relevant biographical information about the artist.

Respond to Issues

2. By reflecting on the viewpoints and examples in this chapter and in previous chapters, develop a position on the Chapter Issue: ***To what extent do the challenges and opportunities related to national unity affect Canadian identity?***

Recognize Relationships between Concepts, Issues, and Citizenship

3. What relationship exists between the protection, advocacy, and advancement of individual rights in Canada and the promotion of Canadian unity? To what extent does the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms both provide opportunities for unity and challenge unity?
4. How can tensions between the provinces or territories and the federal government influence your role as a Canadian citizen? Could providing more power and independence to the provinces and territories affect your rights and freedoms as a citizen of Canada? Explain.